

FAO Land Tenure Notes

FAO's Land Tenure Notes provide information on land tenure in a format that can be used by grass-roots organizations which work with small farmers and others in rural communities. Improving secure access to land by the rural poor is essential in order to reduce poverty and hunger and to promote sustainable rural development. Improving people's knowledge of their rights to land is an important part of making rights real, thereby allowing people to improve their livelihoods.

The Land Tenure Notes are complemented by the FAO Land Tenure Studies and the FAO Land Tenure Policy Series.

More information is available at:

http://www.fao.org/sd/in1_en.htm

http://www.fao.org/sd/LTdirect/ltstudies_en.htm

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Preface

Securing the rights of both women and men to land is essential for sustainable rural development, social equity and economic growth. Today women are the major agricultural producers at the household level. Yet their rights are often marginalized and can be lost in development projects unless gender-inclusive practices are implemented.

This guide focuses on gender relations and how their structure may affect access to land. It is designed primarily to support non-governmental organizations (NGOs) but may be useful for local government officials and others who work with farmers and rural households. The guide provides information on “good practices” for gender inclusion. It presents information that NGOs and project staff can share so that people can have a better understanding of their rights to land.

Two important questions to answer are “what do we mean by access to land” and “why is gender important?” This guide begins with these questions and with some of the answers that can be adapted to local situations. Access to land can mean many things in different societies and its complexity is often underestimated in projects designed for the rural poor.

Gender issues are sometimes controversial because they are rooted in culture, tradition, religion, and various sources of law. Men and women are often not well informed about their legal rights; neither do they usually understand the inequities and inefficiencies related to gender and access to land. Being able to answer these questions is a starting point in developing appropriate strategies to improve access to land for both men and women.

The guide addresses some of the strategies that can be used to improve gender equity in access to land by evaluating the current situation to determine whether gender issues exist; by informing people of their rights to land; and by working to empower the marginalized.

The guide concludes by outlining strategies that can be used in land tenure projects such as land reform and land titling and registration. The main objective of these strategies is to ensure that gender and access to land are properly addressed, and that all members of a community have an opportunity to participate and have their rights recognised and protected.

The information in this guide is based on FAO's Land Tenure Studies 4: "Gender and access to land".

This document is available at:

http://www.fao.org/sd/2003/IN07013_en.htm. ■

Introduction

Throughout history, rights to land have been recognized as a source of social status, wealth and power. Land has great cultural, religious and legal significance, and is the basis for food production, shelter and economic activities. Providing secure access to land is an essential part of improving rural livelihoods.

In most societies access to land has favoured certain individuals and groups at the expense of others. Women are one of the groups that often have fewer and weaker rights to land because of biases in formal law, in customs and in the division of labour in society.

The rights to land of vulnerable members of society can be threatened by development projects if gender relations are not properly considered. Land tenure projects, such as land reform or land titling and registration, may result in the title of a family's land being registered in the name of one male member. Projects to improve the land, for example by providing irrigation, may increase the value of marginal land used by women to the point that the land is claimed by men in the community.

Providing gender-inclusiveness in access to land can benefit families, communities and nations through:

- increased investment in land and food production;
- improved family security during economic and social transitions;
- increased economic opportunities;
- better housing;
- improved land management.

NGOs can play an important role in working for more equitable access to land by women and others who are marginalized. ■